



House of Commons
Science and Technology
Committee

**International Policies
and Activities of the
Research Councils:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Ninth Report of
Session 2006–07**

**Seventh Special Report of Session
2006–07**

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The Science and Technology Committee

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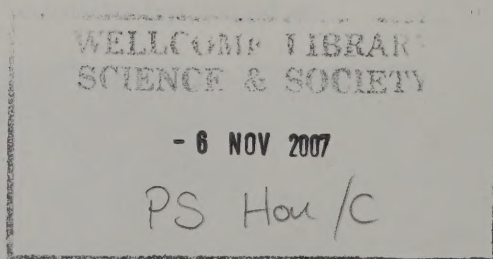
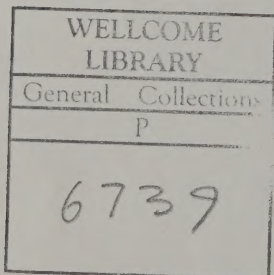
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Seventh Special Report

On 31 July 2007 the Science and Technology Committee published its Ninth Report of Session 2006–07, *International Policies and Activities of the Research Councils* [HC 472– I]. On 25 September 2007 the Committee received a memorandum from the Government which contained a response to the Report. The memorandum is published as an appendix to this Report.

Appendix: Government response

1. The Government welcomes the report of the Select Committee's inquiry into the international policies and activities of the Research Councils.
2. This response has been coordinated by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). It includes input from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department for International Development (DFID) and Research Councils UK (RCUK). We have also consulted with the Royal Society and British Council who have welcomed the Committee's recommendations and indicated their willingness to cooperate with the RCUK International Team.
3. The Government notes and agrees with the Committee's comments that science is an international endeavour. The available evidence shows that the UK research base is highly active internationally. For example 39% of UK scientific papers were internationally co-authored in 2003; a figure which had risen from 20% in 1992. In addition, Research Councils spend over £250m each year on subscriptions to international scientific organisations. Funding mechanisms such as the European Union (EU) Framework Programmes also provide significant opportunities for international collaboration.
4. There have already been a number of key developments in the international activities and policies of the Research Councils since the announcement of the Committee's Inquiry. A major development has been the publication of the RCUK International Strategy; the main points of the strategy are summarised in Annex A. RCUK is also establishing a dedicated International Team and the RCUK International Network has become a formal group reporting regularly to the Research Development Group. The Government supports these initiatives, which are intended to facilitate cross-Council work on international issues and ensure a coordinated approach, and looks forward to working with RCUK in this area.
5. The international sphere of science and innovation is not static and the Government welcomes the Committee's report and recommendations. Its responses are set out below. RCUK responses are in italics.

Measurements of success

Recommendation 1. We believe that it is important for the UK to be able to assess its position and measure its success with regard to international collaboration and international research relationships. We recommend that the Research Councils and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills work together to develop

common mechanisms for the systematic collection of data on international collaborations and to develop ways of assessing their performance in this field. (Paragraph 15)

6. The Government agrees that the UK should be able to measure the success of international collaboration. As stated in our earlier contribution¹, DIUS monitors the activities of the Research Councils and RCUK through a performance management system. All the Research Councils and RCUK have agreed annual delivery plans which set out targets and milestones, monitored and reviewed every quarter by DIUS and fed into its business planning cycle. It is recognised that there is a need for data collection and collation of international collaboration and the Research Councils are working to develop a common approach to the collection of information regarding the international dimension of funded research. RCUK contributes collectively to the development of a UK international Science and Innovation strategy and is a member of Global Science and Innovation Forum (GSIF).

7. RCUK agree on the importance of developing common and systematic means to measure the extent and variety of collaboration between UK and international researchers and will undertake the development of common mechanisms for this. We agree that this should be taken forward in collaboration with DIUS. The RCUK International Team will be responsible for facilitating the implementation of this recommendation, in partnership with other RCUK Groups.

Current activities

Recommendation 2. We acknowledge the diversity of schemes across the Research Councils and encourage the Councils to share best practice. (Paragraph 17)

8. RCUK welcomes the Committee's acknowledgement that a diversity of schemes is needed to ensure schemes appropriate to each Research Council's remit, and the communities they serve, exist. The RCUK International Strategy published in July 2007 (Annex A) provides a focus for sharing good practice and identifying where areas of commonality exist. In addition the creation of the RCUK International Team, and the evolution of the RCUK International Network (RCIN) into a formal RCUK Group, reporting regularly to the Research Development Group and supported by the RCUK Secretariat, will further facilitate cross Council sharing of good practice.

Strategy

Recommendation 3. We welcome the development of the international strategies and recommend that individual Councils review their strategies in the light of the new RCUK strategy. (Paragraph 24)

9. The development of the RCUK International Strategy took into account the Councils' existing individual international strategies and provides all Councils with a common overarching strategy and focus for collective working. The Strategy is reflected in the RCUK and the Research Councils' annual delivery plans. While the RCUK International Strategy

¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/IPAmemosforwebupload.pdf>, pp202– 210

will influence future strategy renewal and development in each of the Councils, this will be a two way process – the international strategies of each of the Councils will feed into future iterations of the RCUK Strategy. RCIN reporting to the Research Development Group will help achieve alignment with research strategies on a cross-Council basis.

Co-ordination

Recommendation 4. We are concerned that the Research Councils' activities and policies are not sufficiently co-ordinated either internally or with one another. RCUK should drive cross-Council co-ordination and ensure that the Research Councils' activities and policies are well aligned. We recommend that RCUK review its next steps to improve the co-ordination of activities beyond the creation of its strategy and establishment of the international team. (Paragraph 28)

10. RCUK welcomes this recommendation which reinforces action already initiated by RCUK collectively and the Research Councils individually. Internal coordination of activities and policies is important to all Research Councils. In respect of international collaboration Research Councils are resourcing an RCUK International Team and developing the role of the RCUK International Group, which will facilitate the alignment of international policies and the channels of communication between and within Councils. In addition the RCUK Executive Group has appointed Dr Randal Richards (until recently the acting Chief Executive of EPSRC) to champion and drive forward the strategic delivery of RCUK international policy; this will include representing RCUK at the European Heads of Research Councils, the G8 Heads of Research Councils, European Science Foundation and GSIF as well as liaising across the RCUK China and US offices and the establishment of the India office. Dr Richards will take up his new post in November 2007.

Visibility

Recommendation 5. We are concerned that the Councils' activities are not widely known about in the research community and recommend that the Councils develop ways of improving the visibility of their schemes and disseminating information to the research community. (Paragraph 32)

11. RCUK agrees that Research Councils need to enhance ways of communicating international activities and opportunities.

12. Research Councils are responsible for delivering Recommendation 1 of the GSIF strategy. This includes increasing the presence of the RCUK brand (which has been taken forward through the production of the RCUK international strategy) and the establishment of overseas offices (the RCUK China office is already operating, the US office is due to open in Autumn 2007 and the India office is likely to open in the spring of 2008).

13. In addition RCUK international offices will be in a position to inform RCUK on perceptions and issues concerning the international activities of the Research Councils in their countries. This will further strengthen Research Councils ability to align their activities and increase their international impact. In addition to this, both the US and China offices are developing communication systems to improve the visibility and dissemination of

Research Council information. In relation to the RCUK overseas offices the following developments should be noted:

RCUK China Office

14. The RCUK China Office information strategy includes a bilingual website aiming to provide timely information for research communities in both countries, including links to information on Research Councils' own websites. It will provide feedback to each Research Council on the visibility of their web information. The China office is also working closely with the FCO Science and Innovation Network team in China, and with other UK organisations (including DFID, UKTI and the British Council) to ensure that RCUK China Office activities are visible to these stakeholders and add value to the overall UK effort.

RCUK US Office

15. The new website for the RCUK US Office is being specifically designed to improve the visibility of Research Councils' schemes. It will have two gateways – one for US researchers and postgraduates looking for support to collaborate with the UK and one for UK researchers and postgraduates wanting to work with the US. This will be searchable by both discipline and type of support and provide specific information on collaborative research opportunities, fellowships, travel awards and support for networking and workshops.

International offices

Recommendation 6. We welcome the establishment of more RCUK offices abroad. These offices should present a coherent picture of UK science and be worthwhile contact points for international collaborators. We recommend that RCUK clarify how these offices will be funded, how their performance will be monitored and how their activities will be reported. (Paragraph 38)

16. The RCUK international offices are all in different stages of planning and development. The exact funding, performance management and reporting mechanisms for these offices are key aspects of this ongoing planning activity. It is likely that the operational and programme costs of all three offices will be funded by the seven Research Councils, at least until the offices are operational and their work packages agreed. It will be important for each office to determine the extent of potential interest from researchers in-country and in the UK for services it can provide (potentially including services similar to those provided by the UK Research Office in Brussels) before details of resourcing, monitoring and reporting are finalised.

RCUK China Office

17. The China Office is steered by the China Office Steering Committee (CHOSC) comprising a member of each sponsoring Research Council. The Director of the China Office will report, via CHOSC, to the RCUK Research Development Group. The development of key performance indicators is an important component of the China Office strategy in its first year of operation.

RCUK US Office

18. Plans for the establishment and operation of the RCUK US Office are currently being finalised. The US Office will have a three year delivery plan, mirroring Research Council delivery plans. This will include a specific annual programme of objectives, milestones and targets and information on performance metrics. The US Office will report quarterly to the Research Councils on the delivery of its objectives and its expenditure as well as producing an annual report and accounts.

19. As previously noted the appointment of Dr Richards to oversee RCUK Strategic Delivery will include his liaison across the China and US offices and participation in the development of the India office. This will ensure that good practice can be shared in all aspects of the development of the governance and performance management of the international offices.

Funding

Recommendation 7. We welcome agreements made to reduce double jeopardy but encourage further work in this area, including increasing the number of joint calls with other institutions. (Paragraph 43)

20. The Government will support and encourage all measures that RCUK is taking to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the peer review process.

21. RCUK welcomes the Committee's recognition of the work that has been undertaken by Research Councils to reduce double jeopardy; work to reduce double jeopardy as a barrier to international collaboration is a key aspect of implementing the RCUK International Strategy.

22. The number of collaborative calls for research between Research Councils and international partners continues to increase, and enhancing collaboration between US research funders and the Research Councils, thereby increasing the number of joint calls that are made, is an aim of the RCUK US Office. However, RCUK does recognise that there is still a long way to go and are committed to removing, wherever possible, barriers to collaborative working.

23. In his new role Dr Richards will work with the RCUK US office and DIUS to progress the development of an overarching agreement with National Science Foundation to facilitate research programmes with all Research Councils.

24. The opening of international offices, and the liaison between these offices, should enable Councils to reach new collaborative agreements with existing and potential funding partners in these countries and enable good practice to be developed for use by Research Councils and RCUK in many other countries.

25. The removal of barriers to international collaboration includes equipping UK researchers with the skills required to conduct research overseas and enhancing the attractiveness of the UK as a destination for the best international researchers. The RCUK Research Careers and Diversity Strategy published in January 2007 sets out our approach to achieve these aims².

Recommendation 8. STFC's use of rolling grants to fund travel without the need for separate applications should be considered by the other Councils as an example of best practice. (Paragraph 45)

26. RCUK recognises the importance of travel funding to Research Council grant holders. Travel costs are already a key constituent of Research Council grant funding across all Research Councils; care is taken to ensure peer reviewers acknowledge the importance of this in their assessments. Travel funding is already available within grants without being subject to separate application. The sharing of good practice between Research Councils on such schemes will in future be facilitated by the RCUK International Team and the RCUK International Network.

Recommendation 9. The RCUK should clarify the reasons why the Research Councils are engaged in international collaborations. It should outline when and why the Research Councils should provide strategic or follow-on funding and how such funding relates to their aim of funding the best science. (Paragraph 49)

27. The recently published RCUK International Strategy sets out the Councils' reasoning for engaging in international collaborations. The strategy says that "while the UK is among the world's top research nations, its research base can only thrive if it engages with the best minds, organisations and facilities, wherever they are found. The world is changing fast. Fresh opportunities and new research performers are emerging. This strategy sets out how RCUK can grasp these opportunities and build on the UK's already impressive international research... The new globalised research community provides new challenges, which Research Councils are determined to meet." The implementation of the RCUK International Strategy will require careful consideration of why and when the provision of strategic follow-on funding relates to Councils' aim of funding the best research. There is a need to consider how this can be balanced with the varying research priorities, international strategies and budgets of each of the Research Councils, as well as the expectations of researchers in the UK and overseas. This will be taken forward by RCUK.

Recommendation 10. The majority of funding for international activities is embedded within Research Council budgets. We recommend that the Research Councils increase the flexibility of funding within their general budgets for international activities and simplify the process for cross-Council funding and long-term funding for international work. We believe that the benefits of a dedicated funding stream for international activities such as travel grants and visiting fellowships outweigh the potential drawbacks. We recommend that the Research Councils establish a small central fund for travel grants and visiting fellowships to be administered by RCUK using simple application methods. (Paragraph 55)

28. RCUK recognises the Committee's concern about the flexibility and simplicity of Research Council processes with regard to the funding of international activities. This is being considered by the RCUK Research Development Group and will be integral to the implementation of the RCUK International Strategy.

29. As noted in response to Recommendation 8, money for international travel is already integral to existing Research Council funding mechanisms and there are already a number of effective Research Council travel grant and fellowship schemes in operation.

Impact of strategy on mobility and research careers

Recommendation 11. We encourage the Councils to expand the study of the extent to which PhD students and researchers in the UK work abroad to explore the reasons underpinning the decisions of researchers to work abroad or stay in the UK and to alter their policies accordingly. It is necessary, for the health of the research base, and to comply with the new positive duty for public authorities to promote gender equality, for the Research Councils and the Government to understand the barriers that women in research face and take such steps as are necessary to ensure they are overcome. (Paragraph 64)

30. RCUK welcomes the suggestion of the Committee to expand its survey of overseas experience of researchers to include reasons for decision to work abroad or stay in the UK. We recognise that it is important to differentiate between researchers who are students, post-docs or research fellows as the policy implications will differ.

31. The recent Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) report, 'Global Horizons for UK Students' highlights that "for students, a period of study or work abroad brings personal benefits both personally and professionally. It enhances their understanding of other languages and cultures, and increases their confidence and self-reliance. In a global economy these skills and competencies are increasingly sought by employers, and students with this experience will find that their employability is higher than without it."³

32. In recognition of this, RCUK will continue to review the value of existing studies, including the CIHE report, within the sector. We consider that this can best be taken forward through the 'Researchers: What is the Situation?' annual reports that RCUK compiles for the Funders' Forum⁴.

33. The Councils are fully conscious of their 'positive duty' under discrimination law and the need to ensure that the science base has access to high quality researchers of both genders. In terms of mobility we recognise that the problems that researchers (predominantly women) potentially face on returning to research after a career break are compounded when mobility factors are included. This is not solely a UK issue and the EU green paper 'The European Research Area: New Perspectives'⁵ makes clear that establishing effective "brain circulation" in Europe requires work at all levels. The Councils are currently working with partners, in particular the UK Resource Centre for women in SET and the Equality Challenge Unit, to understand the barriers facing women returning to research and believe that these collaborations can also begin to address mobility issues. In developing a new 'Concordat for the Career Management of Research Staff' the Councils and their partner organisations have flagged the need for flexibility and adaptability in a diverse, mobile and global research environment. The Councils will adopt this directly for the 4000 researchers employed in their own Institutes.

Recommendation 12. We are concerned that Research Council schemes to improve mobility are not working well. This may be because they are not sufficiently visible or because they fail to address the challenges faced by researchers such as familiarity with

3 <http://www.cihe-uk.com/docs/PUBS/0707GLOBAL.pdf>

4 <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/publications/rwitsar07.pdf>

5 http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era_gp_final_en.pdf

foreign languages and family commitments. We recommend that RCUK, monitored by the Director General of Science and Innovation, consult stakeholders on how policies relating to mobility could be improved. (Paragraph 66)

34. The Government thinks that these issues of mobility are best handled within the context of the RCUK Research Careers and Diversity Strategy and its International Strategy and will support RCUK in its efforts to improve such schemes.

35. *The Research Councils are taking action to raise the visibility of their support for International holders of research fellowships as a priority.*

36. *The GSIF strategy noted that the support for international mobility provided by the UK is comparable with that of its competitors. In the broadest sense, UK support in this area is having a positive impact and should be continued at a level of funding that will maintain this impact in the light of increasing global opportunities, recognising also the value of such schemes in supporting achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It also proposed an alumni network of fellows who have been working in the UK to ensure that in the longer term potentially valuable collaborative relationships are not lost.*

37. A Higher Education Policy Institute report 'Brain Drain'⁶ analysing Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data suggests that in the UK over the period from 1995 to 2003 there was substantial net immigration of academics. Both immigration and emigration rates have tended to increase throughout the period even as the total staffing complement of the sector has increased. This serves to illustrate the greater mobility of the Higher Education workforce.

38. The 'Researchers: What is the situation?' Annual Report to the UK Research Base Funders Forum 2007 sets out the progress against the 2006 recommendations and makes two further recommendations.⁷ To enable improved information on researcher mobility, RCUK and other research funders are discussing with HESA common issues regarding career tracking and how to improve the data. The 2007 report strengthens the recommendation.

39. RCUK have launched an International Fellowship Association for overseas nationals holding Research Council fellowship awards as a pilot for a single UK scheme, including fellows of other funders. The intention is to consult and work with these fellows to build the association based on their priorities with regard to mobility and maintaining connections with the UK, in particular the provision of relevant information on funding opportunities. We will also consider extending membership of the association to UK nationals who intend to work overseas.

Government initiatives

Recommendation 13. We welcome the Global Science and Innovation Forum (GSIF) but emphasise that it needs to increase its visibility, publicise itself and prove its worth. We recommend that GSIF's performance be monitored by the Government Chief Scientific Adviser's Office in DIUS. (Paragraph 74)

6 <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/pubsalph.asp?DOC=Reports>

7 See foot note 3

40. The Government is pleased that the Committee recognises the role of the Global Science and Innovation Forum providing a vehicle for the exchange of information and ideas to improve coordination of UK international science and innovation activity. Information about the work of GSIF is published on its web pages and consideration will be given to expanding the information available and publicising its work more widely. GSIF works through its members – across government and more widely – to communicate UK strengths in this area. The GSIF Secretariat, in the Government Office for Science, maintains close links with all the members of GSIF on an ongoing basis and regularly reports to the Government Chief Scientific Adviser in his role as chair of GSIF.

Recommendation 14. We welcome the FCO's Science and Innovation Network. We recommend that the Research Councils and FCO continue to work to improve co-ordination. The FCO should play a stronger role in the delivery of the Research Councils' international policies providing in-country assistance and advice when necessary. (Paragraph 80)

41. The Government agrees that there should continue to be effective coordination between the Research Councils and the FCO Science and Innovation Network (SIN). The Research Councils are one of the most important stakeholders for the SIN and there is already a close working relationship. The SIN is committed to improving the effectiveness of this relationship and will continue to build on the steps already taken. These include having a Research Council stakeholder manager and regular communication via the Science and Innovation Group in London. The priorities of each of the Research Councils varies on a country by country basis and SIN will continue to work with individual Councils to help them achieve their aims for international engagement.

42. RCUK welcome a closer working relationship with the FCO SIN and hope the FCO can play a role in delivering RCUK's international strategy. RCUK currently plan to continue improving co-ordination with FCO SIN through regular dialogue with the Science and Innovation Group in London and ongoing dialogue through GSIF.

43. An example of effective working between the Research Councils and FCO has been the development of plans for the RCUK offices overseas.

RCUK China Office

44. The RCUK China Office is working very closely with FCO SIN China. For example, its website is being developed in consultation with the SIN 'Partners in Science' project, and many cross-links will be provided therein. The Office also has a drop-in desk for use by FCO SIN staff. The Office is committed to working closely with FCO-SIN on strategic UK-China science topics where UK Focal Points have been appointed.

RCUK US Office

45. The RCUK US Office will be co-located with the FCO Science and Innovation Group in the Embassy in Washington DC and will work with, and through, the USA SIN. This will strengthen coordination and cooperation, enabling the FCO to play a stronger role in the delivery of Research Councils' international policies.

Recommendation 15. We welcome DFID's collaborative programmes with the Research Councils. DFID and the Councils should confirm how they intend to measure the success of these programmes. We recommend that RCUK monitor the schemes and if appropriate, encourage further collaboration in the area of international development. (Paragraph 83)

46. The Government welcomes the strong partnerships which have been developed between Research Councils (including the RCUK international offices) and DFID. Individual programmes funded by Councils bilaterally with DFID are being monitored through mechanisms such as grant-holder meetings and coordination groups, and will be formally evaluated at the end of the programme according to the evaluation strategies of individual Councils. In addition DFID and ESRC are commissioning an independent review of the joint DFID-ESRC scheme this autumn, the mid-way point in the programme. This will enable lessons to be learnt to improve or revise the current scheme and any future scheme. DFID and BBSRC are also planning a similar review of their joint calls on sustainable agriculture. Information from these reviews will be shared across other joint programmes. The collaborations between DFID and the Research Councils are also subject to DFID's own internal monitoring systems. DFID and Research Councils also participate in the newly formed UK Collaborative on Development Sciences, which will be able to provide overarching monitoring and evaluation of UK development research needs, including undertaking gap analyses, identifying research themes and monitoring and developing UK and overseas capacity.

Recommendation 16. We welcome the work that has been done by OSI in developing partnerships with other countries. We are concerned, however, that the UK's position as a desirable international partner is slipping and that the Government is working within an increasingly competitive international environment. DIUS needs to ensure that relationships with other countries are exploited at all levels from Government to Government to researcher to researcher. (Paragraph 95)

47. The Government welcomes the Committee's acknowledgement of the Government's activities and progress in developing partnerships with other countries through various frameworks and mechanisms. The Government also continues to recognise the impact of globalisation on competition for international partnerships and the need to engage fully at all levels from Ministerial bilateral meetings, Joint Commissions with partner countries and by supporting a wide range of researcher visits and exchanges in order to develop these partnerships. Such DIUS engagement will extend fully across innovation, universities and skills in the context of wider DIUS policy objectives. These activities include relationships with developed and emerging nations and are undertaken in the UK and in partner countries. Each relationship will also reflect the individual characteristics of the respective UK-partner countries. We will continue to work with GSIF to select and pursue potential new partners as well as maintaining and improving our relationships with existing partners.

48. The need to widen and deepen partnerships with other countries is explicitly recognised in the second phase of the Prime Ministers' Initiative for International Education (PMI2). PMI2 is a five year programme which aims to secure the UK's position as a leader in the international education market. As part of this programme, the

government will be supporting educational institutions to develop and extend collaborations with institutions overseas.

Recommendation 17. There is a failure properly to follow up schemes, initiatives and visits. We believe that ensuring appropriate follow up to Government initiatives will require more funding as well as an improved strategy. We recommend that DIUS invest more money in developing partnerships and work with the Research Councils and Academies to ensure consistent follow-up to its work, particularly the Years of Science initiative. (Paragraph 96)

49. DIUS will keep both its strategy and budget deployment under review, including placing emphasis on support for activities which can demonstrate a clear strategy for follow-up activity that will add value.

50. A key way to address the issue of follow-up is through joint strategic planning at an early stage – to ensure better alignment of existing plans and mechanisms – and through more effective horizon scanning. The views of counterparts overseas should also be taken into account to maximise outputs. Existing mechanisms for coordination across government and more widely, such as GSIF, can be used in the planning, funding and delivery of schemes, initiatives and visits. DIUS-funded bilateral contacts and networking schemes create demand for responsive-mode collaboration which can be pursued through Research Council and other funding mechanisms. The Research Councils play an integral role in the UK's approach – in addition to funding research they can usefully assist the UK effort in promoting knowledge-sharing and best practice, facilitating two-way fact-finding missions and assisting with the identification of key researcher groups in the UK.

51. Best practice from the “Years of Science” with China and Brazil will be applied to future initiatives. Both have generated strategic memoranda of understanding and agreements between UK research institutes and their counterparts. In addition they have achieved extensive media coverage and engagement with the research communities. They have enhanced delivery of government objectives and stimulated effective synergies between UK science, innovation and wealth creation activities.

Co-ordination between organisations

Recommendation 18. We believe that relations between the Research Councils, the Royal Society, British Council and others could be improved further. We recommend that the RCUK international team take steps to improve co-ordination and communication with the Royal Society, British Council and others, seeking advice and adopting models of best practice where appropriate. (Paragraph 104)

52. *The Government agrees there is much to be gained by all parties in improving coordination and communication between RCUK, Royal Society, British Council and others. RCUK does recognise that steps to achieve improved communication and co-ordination with such stakeholders will be an important element of the delivery of the RCUK International Strategy and this will be addressed. In this context the Government also notes the coordination role GSIF can play.*

Recommendation 19. We recommend that the Science and Innovation Group within DIUS become a hub for co-ordinating the international activities and policies of the

Research Councils, Learned Societies, charities and others. We recommend that DIUS work with relevant organisations using resources such as the British Council Support for International Science, Technology and Engineering Research portal to ensure that there is minimal overlap between schemes encouraging the development of international links. (Paragraph 105)

53. Within DIUS the Government Office for Science and the Science and Innovation Group maintain links with the Research Councils, Learned Societies, charities and other relevant organisations on a range of issues. In the specific area of international science and innovation activity GSIF plays an important role in bringing together these organisations to exchange information, recognise opportunities for collaborative approaches and to identify overlaps and gaps. The Core Officials' Group which supports GSIF provides regular and ongoing dialogue to identify appropriate areas for coordination. Recognising the trans-departmental nature of this work the Secretariat for GSIF and its officials' group sits within the Government Office for Science. The Government regards the mechanisms already in place for the coordination of Research Councils international activities and policies with other bodies as appropriate. DIUS shares the Committee's objective of minimal overlap of schemes.

Overview

Recommendation 20. We believe that the Research Councils could improve their support for researchers applying for European funding. We are concerned that European programmes are less attractive to UK researchers because the programmes have a reputation for bureaucracy and are unlikely to cover the full economic costs of research. DIUS should work with the Research Councils to advertise the improvements in Framework Programme 7 to reduce bureaucracy and speed up processes. DIUS, Research Councils, HEFCE and universities should work together to devise a solution to cover the shortfall between Framework Programme 7 funding and the full economic costs of research. (Paragraph 116)

54. The UK Government successfully negotiated significant simplification of Framework Programme 7 (FP7), based around the concepts of flexibility, rationalisation and coherence in clarification of rights and obligations. This simplification was advertised to the research community at the UK launch of FP7 in February 2007 and more specifically to the academic community at the UKRO conference in July 2007. In addition, the Government, through the Technology Strategy Board, funds the FP7UK website which provides information and support for both experienced and first-time Framework Programme applicants.

55. The UK academic sector received 8.5% of all FP6 funding, about one quarter of the funding received by the European academic community as a whole. This does not suggest that UK Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) view co-financing as a disincentive, especially as the reimbursement rate on research and technological development projects was then 50%. In FP7, non-profit public bodies, secondary and higher education establishments and research organisations and small and medium sized enterprises are able to receive up to 75% of eligible costs for research and technological development projects, a significant improvement on FP6. In addition, reimbursement for actions on frontier research, co-

ordination and support, and training and career development of researchers can be up to 100% of eligible costs.

56. The principle underpinning the Framework Programme is shared cost, i.e. that participants co-finance the research and development work. This ensures that participants make strategic decisions about which areas of research to pursue based on the likelihood of their being able to exploit the results commercially in due course. HEIs are responsible at an institutional level for recovering the full economic costs of the totality of the research they undertake. The necessity to find the remaining 25% of eligible costs for FP7 projects means that HEIs will participate only in projects which make strategic sense in terms of their portfolio of activities.

57. *The Research Councils sponsor the UK Research Office (UKRO) based in Brussels. UKRO is the UK's leading information and advice service on European Union funding for research and higher education, and continues to disseminate information about the improvements in FP7 to most universities in the UK. In addition UKRO provides generic and bespoke training in support of researchers applying for funding and managing EU contracts. We would encourage UK research organisations to subscribe to the service provided by UKRO to help improve their own awareness in these areas. There may also be a need to communicate the improvements in Framework Programme to the private sector to encourage better UK participation – this is an action for DIUS from the GSIF strategy.*

58. *As already noted the Framework Programme operates on the basis of cost sharing between the EU and the programme participants. Thus, FP7 grants are intended to provide co-financing and not to fund the full economic cost of the research. FP7 has increased rates of reimbursement, but we recognise that some parts of the programme may still require significant co-funding from participants. We agree that it is important that Research Councils work together with DIUS, Funding Councils and other relevant stakeholders, such as HM Treasury, to discuss the issues surrounding FP funding. However RCUK have no immediate plans to provide top-up funding from their current resources.*

Annex A

International Research: a Strategy for the UK Research Councils

Since the submission of evidence to this inquiry, Research Councils UK has published its strategy for international engagement. This document sets out five aims:

- A1. Encourage collaboration between UK researchers and the best researchers around the world. International collaboration exposes UK researchers to new ideas and fresh approaches, and enables them to compare their work with the best elsewhere. Much world class research for the public good can be achieved only through global collaboration. RCUK aims to make it simpler for UK researchers to collaborate with their preferred research partners around the world by supporting enabling activities and removing barriers.
- A2. Promote the movement of researchers to and from the UK. Many researchers benefit from working overseas, particularly in the early part of their careers. It provides them with different skills and ideas and lays the foundation for career-long collaborations. RCUK will promote the UK as a place to undertake research, encourage UK researchers to spend time overseas, and equip them with the skills they need to thrive there.
- A3. Give UK researchers access to data, facilities and resources. The Research Councils aim to provide UK researchers with the best national facilities, but in many cases research needs to be undertaken overseas or in international facilities and we will continue to work to facilitate access to the resources necessary for research, whether in the UK or overseas.
- A4. Influence the international agenda. As a strong research nation, the UK has a major role to play in influencing international research policy and delivery, and in maximising its impact. As well as its reputation in research, the UK is seen as a world leader in areas such as research ethics, peer review and public engagement. By exerting their influence overseas, Research Councils will enhance the reputation of UK research and make it the international partner of choice.
- A5. Promote the UK as a world centre for research and innovation. The UK is a favoured location for research by companies from around the world. Several of the UK's most successful industries, notably pharmaceutical, have a world perspective. They are dependent on research and need to know that UK science is of world standard. RCUK will work to ensure that Britain remains an attractive environment for research and innovation.

The full strategy can be found at:

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/publications/international.pdf>.

September 2007

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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